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General Assembly

Official Records

Special Committee on the Situation with Regard to the Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples

1448th Meeting
Friday, 14 July 1995, 10 a.m.
New York

Acting Chairman: Mr. Bangura . . . . . (Sierra Leone)

The meeting was called to order at 12.05 p.m.

One hundred and second report of the Working Group (A/AC.109/L.1835) (*continued*)

Mrs. Cueto (Cuba) (*interpretation from Spanish*): The delegation of Cuba, along with the delegation of the Russian Federation and undoubtedly like all delegations present, is well aware of the controversial discussions that have been taking place in the High-Level Open-Ended Working Group on the Financial Situation of the United Nations. We have carefully read the Secretary-General's appeals to all Member States to help find an appropriate and prompt solution of the financial situation of the Organization. It must be asked, however, whether it is up to this Committee alone to take specific steps in response to this situation or whether the Russian Federation's appeal should be directed primarily to those Member States, major contributors, that have enormous arrears with the Organization. They are not exactly the States that are seated around this table as members of the Special Committee.

We have studied carefully the amendments proposed to the report by the Russian Federation, because we wished to determine the extent to which the Russian Federation had committed itself to the financial and budgetary salvation of the Organization. We believe it should be noted that, from a purely procedural standpoint, the positions taken by the High-Level Working Group are not as yet decisions, strictly speaking, much less adopted resolutions. The discussion that has been taking place within that Working Group in no way represents instructions to the United Nations or directly to any Committee such as ours.

Although the Russian representative submitted substantive amendments at a very late stage after lengthy discussions, my delegation tried to pay the greatest possible attention. But I believe that it might not be superfluous if that delegation were to repeat them to assist our consideration. We have some general comments on Cuba's substantive position relating to the future and nature of this Committee and not on specific amendments. Rather than commenting on those amendments one by one — and I would repeat that, because of the lateness of the hour, it was very hard for us to take them down in full — we would like to state our substantive position on the proposals made by the Russian Federation.

First, we wish to indicate that when the Russian representative proposes that the appropriations necessary to support the activities of this Committee should be made "as appropriate", my delegation believes that the wording is superfluous and redundant. In view of the situation facing the Organization, if we state that the provisions for the activities of the Committee should be those that are necessary, it would not be accurate to say "as appropriate" as well because, if we were to do this, we would run the risk of eliminating the necessary provisions of the Committee by implying that we no longer need them. My delegation is therefore content with the current wording of paragraph 4.

With regard to the number of meetings held by the Committee last year and this year, we believe that the Committee's current session demonstrates clearly that, despite its heavy workload, there has been a marked reduction in the time provided for its activities. We are

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trying to do our work in just one scant week, although we all realize that the matters with which we are dealing are of great importance to many Territories and States members of the Special Committee.

For example, with regard to the decrease in the number of meetings and travel, it has to be said that there was no increase in expenditure this year. Judging by the comments of the petitioners who have appeared before the Committee realize the relevance and the need to increase the number of missions to the various Territories. The entire budget for the Committee's activities grew by only 0.8 per cent, and there was no increase in the expenditure on travel. We believe that it would be wrong at this stage to put limits of this kind on ourselves, taking into account the fact that the Committee, unlike other United Nations bodies, has been quite austere in its expenditure.

I should like now to make some comments on documentation. We are aware of the fact that in the Fifth Committee an appeal has been made to this Committee to review its documentation procedures. We have been asked to decide whether it is necessary to maintain verbatim records or whether we should have summary records instead. Cuba's position on this question is that we are approaching a critical stage with regard to the mandate and functions of the Special Committee and that it is important that, far from submitting just a brief report of our proceedings concerning the various Territories, we should retain the current system of documentation. In other words, we believe that it is necessary to retain the verbatim record, rather than have some sort of compilation or rapporteur system of dealing with the problems in the Territories — quite the opposite.

We have been very flexible. A look at the Committee's records will show that the resolutions on the various Territories have been considerably tightened up, in letter and in spirit. Therefore, I do not believe that we should agree to having brief, general documentation which would not really reflect the real situation in the Territories that the Committee addresses.

With regard to a possible revision of the list of Territories to which the Declaration applies, my delegation emphasizes that in the mid-term review this list was adopted as it stands — that is, with 17 Territories — under General Assembly resolutions 45/253 and 47/214. We do not overlook the possibility that that list will be reviewed, but, at least for the time being, the Committee should not take a hasty decision on this matter. The very history and future of the decolonization process should dictate whether or not the list is shortened. For the time being, the delegation of Cuba takes the view that the list of Territories to which the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples applies should be retained as it stands.

These, in broad outline, are our comments on the amendments proposed by the Russian Federation.

We would like to point out that the rules of procedure that govern the Committee's work provide a broad umbrella covering a wide range of activities that we wish to undertake. General Assembly resolution 1514 (XV) — generally, but specifically in paragraph 6 — is wide in nature and gives this Committee a broad mandate. We should remember this, as that resolution not only deals with the Non-Self-Governing Territories, but also gives the Committee latitude to consider many other matters.

Despite the negative constraints that have been imposed on us in recent times, my country will advocate in any arena or any forum that this Committee's work should be strengthened, because we believe that the process of decolonization is not complete, but is an ongoing process in which much remains to be done. In this respect, many Territories and many peoples of the world look with hope to the Committee. Yesterday I was somewhat distressed to hear a comment made by a petitioner, who said that this body would appear to be a Committee of petitioners rather than the Special Committee. Cuba would regret such a situation and hopes that it does not exist. As a country, we have made our contribution to enhancing the Committee's credibility, and we shall continue to do so.

Although, as a country and as a delegation, we recognize the needs and pressures of the financial situation and take note of the Secretary-General's appeals, we believe that introducing, precipitately and almost at the last meeting of the session, amendments which, in practice, would question and revise all our procedures and rules of operation and the Committee's very mandate and *raison d'être* is not, and never will be, the most appropriate way of helping to resolve such a crisis.

Lastly, although the Cuban delegation respects the right of any delegation to present amendments at any point in the negotiations, we would like to point out, as a member of the bureau of the Committee, that Cuba believes that the negotiations and consultations that we

hold in the Committee must be sufficiently transparent to enable any Member State or anyone else to participate in them. If at any stage they are unable to do so, they can submit ideas and suggestions directly to the bureau or to you, Mr. Chairman, whose approach is characterized by enduring transparency. It is important that substantive amendments that make a great impact on the work of the Committee should be considered at the proper time, and not in a hasty, last-minute fashion, as in this case.

I am sure that members know that Cuba speaks with candour in all international forums. We have always taken pride in the transparency, professionalism and impartiality that have prevailed in the United Nations Secretariat, which has strictly respected the code of conduct to be followed by international civil servants. But it has to be said that this is not always the case in the Special Committee of 24. The representative of the Russian Federation has been extremely active, and we have noted that several members of the Secretariat, notwithstanding the fact that they should be displaying impartiality, seem to be acting as if they were full members of that country's delegation.

To be sure, the Cuban delegation has taken note of this attitude, but we are flexible. We believe that this flexibility should be reciprocated: members of the Secretariat can have an influence over members of delegations, through either written or oral communication; but we also believe that delegations, through the Secretariat, can transmit to the Bureau or to the Chair proposals directly connected with the future and the very existence of the Committee, so that these proposals can be considered by the entire Committee in the proper manner. We are ready to put forward all necessary arguments in support of our position; we believe that the ethics by which the international civil service should be governed are clearly defined. We feel that Cuba has been sufficiently flexible on this matter.

Mr. Chtcherbak (Russian Federation) (*interpretation from Russian*): I thank the representative of Cuba for stating her delegation's position on this question. It is clear that the Cuban delegation has not correctly understood me, and I want first of all to repeat something I have already said. My delegation offered its amendments in plenary meetings of the Committee, not in haste, but because it did not have an opportunity to do so in the Working Group. We were deprived of that opportunity. That is why my delegation was obliged to introduce its amendments in plenary meeting.

Secondly, I wish to emphasize that I introduced my amendments in the expectation that their substance would be discussed and that the Committee would waste no further time on general statements. When we talk about the need to enhance the effectiveness of the work of the Committee, we are thinking of all aspects of this question, from the substance of the documents we produce to the organization of our work. Unfortunately, the way in which some members of the Committee relate to the task of enhancing the effectiveness of our work is illustrated all too clearly by our having begun this meeting two hours late. Moreover, this creates a situation where delegations are unable to address other important issues. It holds up the work of our session, and it leads to unproductive and excessive costs for the Organization. I would have thought that a two hour delay in starting a Committee meeting would represent a substantial amount of money.

I urge that we move from general statements to a discussion of the draft document before us, and I shall make a few comments on that document.

With respect to paragraph 9 and to my delegation's position in favour of replacing verbatim with summary records, I would note that this reflects the practice established by the Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee), a practice that has proved its usefulness in other areas of the Organization as well. I would think that the Secretariat staff are sufficiently well qualified to prepare summary records that give a clear account of the positions expressed by delegations. But if any delegation wants to use verbatim records for its own propaganda purposes, I do not think the Organization ought to pay for such activities. While some may want to engage in propagandistic activities, my delegation for its part just wants to get on with the job. Every delegation has the right to produce its own press releases and to use other means to publicize its views.

Turning to paragraph 10, I apologize to members of the Committee; I wish to offer a new amended version of that paragraph, which I have supplied in written form for circulation to members. Let me explain its purpose. My delegation emphasizes that not one of the amendments it has introduced is the fruit of its own creativity. All that my delegation has tried to do is to summarize and synthesize the proposals put forward by Committee members over a long period of time, as reflected in the recent seminar held in Trinidad and Tobago and in its decisions. This, and particularly the consensus conclusions and recommendations of the seminar, is

wholly applicable to what my delegation has to say about paragraphs 3, 10, 14 and 24.

I should none the less like to explain precisely what my delegation had in mind when it proposed its amendments to paragraph 10. In 1995, we are at the mid-point of the implementation of the Plan of Action of the International Decade. Next year, there will only be four years left of the Plan period. My delegation feels that the time has come to take a careful and detailed look at those matters with which our Special Committee is concerned, particularly with regard to the work of its Subcommittee.

Our sole purpose is not to delete any Territories from our agenda, but constructively, carefully and attentively to examine their progress towards our general objective, the implementation of the Plan of Action and the overall fulfilment of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples. That is the purpose of my proposal.

In my delegation's view, such a careful and comprehensive analysis — of course, on the basis of documents to be prepared by the Secretariat and with the possible involvement of the administering Powers — would tend to stimulate the work of our Committee towards the accomplishment of the tasks entrusted to us under our mandate. The intention of my delegation and the aim of its work in the Committee is to accelerate decision-making on the Committee's tasks and to enhance the effectiveness of its work in the interests of achieving the aim for which it was established. My delegation urgently requests the members of all other delegations to understand that this was our motive.

Mr. Mwambulukutu (United Republic of Tanzania): Since I am speaking for the first time, allow me to congratulate you, Sir, on your assumption of your important responsibility as acting Chairman of our Committee. Let me also commend the role played by Ambassador Pursoo, who unfortunately had to leave owing to unforeseen circumstances.

I am among those people who came here rather late. I make the point that it was not deliberate. I was doing other work for the United Nations and I apologize for the expense I am incurring and the inconvenience I may be causing to some representatives.

My comment is going to be a general one, like those of other speakers. I too noted the very useful and ingenious amendments introduced by the delegation of the Russian Federation yesterday. Unfortunately, as we left at the eleventh hour last night we did not have the actual text. I am therefore trying to decipher my own notes and I come to the conclusion that, well-intentioned as these amendments are, they actually serve to hold back our work even further and cost us a lot more.

As for the general references to the question of costs, and particularly to the Secretary-General's statement on the financial situation of the United Nations, like the Cuban representative I have the feeling that this matter is being adequately dealt with elsewhere. As far as my delegation is concerned, that statement constituted an appeal to Member States to meet all their obligations and pay their dues on time. It was particularly directed to countries with arrears, some of which also happen to be entrusted with the responsibility for decisions which affect the entire membership of the United Nations. We should all pay accordingly.

Since, as I said, my remarks will be general, I must honestly state that the changes being introduced are very useful but will not greatly alter the text. It is a question of emphasis rather than substance, as far as my delegation is concerned. I would appeal to our colleague from the Russian delegation and maybe to members of other delegations to leave the text as it was presented to us. Perhaps at the next session we might look very carefully into some of the ideas, which are a bit ahead of our Committee at this stage in the sense that references have also been made to the report of the Trinidad and Tobago seminar, which we have not yet formally discussed. Maybe it will be the next item. I believe the discussion of some of these matters might best be carried over to the next session, because the report to which the Russian delegation very correctly refers, and from which he cites, reflects the new mood of our time. We think some of the discussion in Trinidad and Tobago went a bit beyond the point where some delegations may be comfortable.

This was an attempt to adapt the conduct of this Committee to the new circumstances facing us. We have never been in any doubt whatsoever about the commitment of the Russian Federation or Russia as a country to the cause of decolonization. Some of us have always worked with the Russian delegation. We know their internationalist achievements, and so many countries which are now Members of the United Nations owe a great deal to what countries like Russia have done in the past and continue to do now.

I think that at this half-way point in the Decade, we should take care that whatever we do in this Committee should be in the interests of the peoples who are still colonized — those in the 17 Non-Self-Governing Territories, who are bona fide colonial peoples under bona fide administering Powers. It is up to this Committee to see to it that progress is made by the year 2000, though some has been made already along the way.

One of our main problems always has been the non-participation of the administering Powers. We in this Committee try to speak for these Powers because we want their opinion to be known, so that we can make progress in those specific areas.

Concerning paragraph 10, I believe that it has been amended, but I do not know if that amendment was introduced. Allow me then to read from the amended text:

> "Taking into consideration that the International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism has entered its final stage and in conformity with the discussions and decisions of the Special Committee and its subsidiary bodies, the Special Committee should include in the agenda of its 1996 session an item entitled 'The list of the Territories to which the Declaration is Applicable' for detailed and thorough consideration".

I am aware of the concern of the Russian delegation. But it is the understanding of my delegation that the list of Territories is drawn up by the General Assembly, and I think that the resolutions of the General Assembly and the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples are as applicable today to the 17 remaining Territories as they ever were. I would suggest, therefore, that this Committee should focus on giving the peoples of the Non-Self-Governing Territories the opportunity to determine which direction they want to take. Then we will know whether or not they will remain on the list and if they have freely chosen their path.

In conclusion, I would suggest to my colleague from the Russian Federation that in the interest of saving time, which we agree is of the essence, and without watering down the substance of these intended amendments, we stick to the original text as much as possible.

Mr. Viswanathan (India): At the outset, I should like to express our support for the statements made by the representatives of Cuba and Tanzania.

I should also like to thank my colleague from the Russian Federation for explaining to us the motives behind these amendments and the concerns on which they are based. We appreciate this. I want him to know that we all share the same concerns when it comes to ensuring that United Nations resources are used efficiently and economically and that there is no waste. I should like to assure him also that since we all contribute to the United Nations, we all share these concerns. I think that we are heading in the right direction. We have cut down on the meetings and economized on many things, and what we have now is, I think, the minimum. I do not believe there is much scope for further reduction in our activities, because this might hamper the effective implementation of the mandate of the Committee.

We must keep in mind that we cannot now, in the final stages of decolonization, place another obstacle in the path of this Committee, especially a self-created one. Of course, I should like to assure him that the ultimate objective of this Committee is its own self-destruction. We want this Committee to wind itself up as soon as the goals of decolonization are achieved, and for this we have set the year 2000 as a target date. The United Nations would no longer have to spend money on this Committee, and we are all looking forward to that day.

I should like now to deal one by one with the amendments proposed by the Russian Federation, in addition to supporting the appeal of our colleague from Tanzania that any amendments to the paper just presented by the Working Group — with which we are happy — could be reduced to a minimum so as not to affect the substance of the paper.

I think the amendment to paragraph 4 that reads "as appropriate, by the General Assembly", is not necessary. We cannot support it because we should not put this kind of handicap on the work of the Committee. If the issue is seminars and related expenditures, I should like to say that we found the seminar held in Trinidad and Tobago very useful and very educational. A number of ideas were clarified in a very informal atmosphere. We think, therefore, that these seminars are useful and that we should not cut down on such expenditures. Other bodies deal with the financing of the United Nations as a whole, so it is for them to decide. Let us not place an obstacle in our own path.

In paragraph 5, the representative of the Russian Federation refers to the request of the Secretary-General in his statement of 22 June 1995. This is not necessary.

The resolutions and working papers of the other Committees do not go into these matters, and what applies to other Committees and bodies applies to us also. We do not have to insert anything that specifically takes note of these matters. We all are aware of that.

With respect to paragraph 6 (b), in which the heading "Subsidiary bodies" has been replaced by the heading "Subcommittee and Working Group", I am not familiar with the procedure, but I have no problem with this amendment.

His suggested amendment to paragraph 8 — the production of one consolidated working paper on all Non-Self-Governing Territories — is not acceptable. These Territories face different circumstances, problems and issues, and we have agreed in this Committee to take note of these differences and deal with them on a differentiated basis. That purpose would be defeated if we were to ask for a consolidated working paper. We would insist that there should be separate papers on each of these Territories.

The amendment to paragraph 9 states that the Committee's verbatim records should be replaced by summary records. We have no problem with that so long as it is done in all the other Committees as well. The day the United Nations decides that this will be done uniformly in all the Committees, we too can follow that directive. But we cannot discriminate by saying that in this particular Committee, we will have only summary records, while others have verbatim records.

On the question of the list of Territories, we have no problem with this, except that it could be made more meaningful. I find that there is one issue we have not addressed in this Committee: the implementation of the Plan of Action drawn up in connection with the International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism. This needs to be reviewed in detail to see what action has been taken; in what areas action needs to be taken and how it is to be done; whether any changes are needed; what the new developments are; and so on. If there is a general review of the Plan of Action of the Decade, naturally the list of Territories will also be covered there. I appeal to my colleague from the Russian Federation to consider that point.

Apart from what the representative of the Russian Federation has suggested, I have an additional comment on paragraph 11. The last sentence refers to the next seminar being held in 1996, to be attended by representatives of Non-Self-Governing Territories in the Pacific region, but I suppose that the seminar will also be open to others also, such as non-governmental organizations, regional organizations and members of the Committee; the text may have to be modified in that light.

I have no problem with the last amendment concerning the proposed new paragraph 14, but I think it needs to be looked at from the point of view of the procedures, rules and regulations that govern these matters.

Mr. Al-Attar (Syrian Arab Republic) (*interpretation from Arabic*): This meeting started two hours late; as very little time remains for the Committee to conclude its work, I shall be very brief and will not repeat what other speakers have said. The representative of India has appealed to the representative of the Russian Federation to take into consideration what other members have said; if we agree to amendments, they should be objective and aimed at strengthening, not weakening, the work of the Special Committee.

Some of the amendments that have been offered are indeed objective; I am sure that the representative of the Russian Federation presented them with the interests of the Committee in mind. Perhaps he will not insist that they all be debated, and perhaps members will agree to suitable amendments that will strengthen the work of the Committee. Some of the amendments refer to the financial aspects of the work of the Special Committee. These are very important, because a sword of Damocles is hanging over the Special Committee: the lack of resources and the need for careful, optimal use of the resources that are available.

When the officers of the Committee prepared for the seminar, they suffered greatly under artificial financial constraints. We do not want to adopt amendments that would entail the same kind of suffering in future years. The Bureau takes full account of financial problems when it discusses documentation, meetings, and all other aspects of our work. And we note that the Working Group has rationalized its own work to the maximum extent. It can do no more than that.

By the proposed amendment to paragraph 10, the Secretariat would prepare a list outlining developments in the various Territories. At present, we cannot do this if the administering Power does not cooperate with the Committee. Only when the administering Powers agree to discuss each individual Territory can the Committee

accept such an amendment to paragraph 10. But at the moment it cannot, because General Assembly resolutions and the Charter define the work of the Committee in terms of cooperation with administering Powers; since that cooperation is lacking, the Special Committee can make no changes. Perhaps the representative of the Russian Federation could postpone some of his amendments to the next session. Perhaps in the next few months we will find the administering Powers beginning to cooperate with the Special Committee; we could then give our work a new direction. For the moment, we cannot change the principles and purposes of the Special Committee until the administering Powers begin to cooperate with the Committee.

Ms. Khan-Cummings (Trinidad and Tobago): I just wanted to appeal to all delegations, with a view to advancing the work of the Committee. As you have said, Sir, we have already lost much time and much money. There are merits in all the statements made by all members of the Committee, and I think some of them are highly worthy of consideration. I think we should go straight into those that are worthy of consideration and that we can accept. Those that we need to postpone should be deferred to an appropriate time.

I would like to go directly into some of the amendments offered by the Russian delegation. I think the representative of India was quite right to address the amendments themselves to advance the work of the Committee.

With respect to paragraph 4, I wish to support the recommendation made by India, that we should probably maintain the Working Group's original text.

With respect to paragraph 5, I recall that the Secretariat mentioned yesterday that although the session of the Subcommittee has been reduced to a shorter period this year, I think the number of meetings were more or less the same as last year, or even more. So I am not sure whether the shorter session has really contributed effectively in some financial way. I think we might need to verify that question. I agree that the shorter period compressed the time available for the work of the Committee, which I preferred to the situation last year. I think we should maintain that compression, but I do not think that it contributed to a reduction of the Committee costs. I am not sure whether that is true, so we just need to clarify that.

With respect to paragraph 6 (b), I agree with the recommendation to rename the heading "Subsidiary bodies" as "Subcommittee and Working Group", except that, in section (a) we say "Plenary", which refers to the type of meeting, while section (b) refers to the participants in the meetings. To maintain some conformity, I think section (a) should probably refer to meetings of the Special Committee, while section (b) would refer to meetings of the Subcommittee and Working Group. That would maintain some consistency. It is a matter of form.

With respect to paragraph 8 on consolidating the working papers, although I see the merit of this recommendation, I question the practicability. I know that the documents are issued on a staggered basis, which might sometimes depend on the kind of information available to the Secretariat when preparing them. Whereas I see the merit of having a consolidated document, I wonder about the availability of the information for the production of these papers. I think that element would probably impose some constraints on the Secretariat. It might be necessary to have the documents prepared separately, as was recommended by the representative of India.

I have no problem with the amendment relating to paragraph 9 if that is the established practice.

With respect to the amendment relating to paragraph 10, I think our participation in the seminar in Trinidad gave us some time to reflect on the *raison d'être* of the Committee. We needed some time for soul-searching and to see how we could advance the work of the Committee. I think the Committee should react quickly when there is a need for change and not necessarily engage in a long process, because we know that there are only five years left of the International Decade. If we delay too much, we ourselves will be reducing the length of time available to do our work.

We should take on board whatever amendments are practicable. However, I agree with the representatives of Tanzania and India that, until we have thoroughly discussed and adopted the report of the Working Group on the Seminar in Trinidad, it will not be possible to adopt all those amendments. We may need to postpone a decision on this amendment until we take a decision on this amendment until we take a decision on the report.

With respect to the proposed new paragraph 14, along with the representative of India I am not sure what the procedural aspect is. How is this Working Group elected? There must be some procedure, which we may

need to review. Nor am I sure how having an open-ended bureau would work. It sounds very odd, but I think we have to look at the practicability again and the decision-making process of a bureau. You need to have a small bureau that can take decisions within a short period of time. So we need to look a little more closely at this last amendment.

Also with respect to the form of the report, I have a general recommendation. I note that we have used the arabic numerals for the subheadings as well as for the paragraphs themselves, which seems slightly confusing. We could probably use roman numerals for the subheadings and arabic numerals for the paragraphs, just to clarify the appearance.

The meeting rose at 1.05 p.m.